

This morning, we are continuing through Acts as we are up to Acts 20, continuing to look at Paul's missionary journeys. This passage has a lot to tell us about the church and what kind of people God is looking for in His church. Let's begin by reading verses 1-16:

*Acts 20:1-38 - When the uproar had ended, Paul sent for the disciples and, after encouraging them, said good-bye and set out for Macedonia. <sup>2</sup> He traveled through that area, speaking many words of encouragement to the people, and finally arrived in Greece, <sup>3</sup> where he stayed three months. Because the Jews made a plot against him just as he was about to sail for Syria, he decided to go back through Macedonia. <sup>4</sup> He was accompanied by Sopater son of Pyrrhus from Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius from Derbe, Timothy also, and Tychicus and Trophimus from the province of Asia. <sup>5</sup> These men went on ahead and waited for us at Troas. <sup>6</sup> But we sailed from Philippi after the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and five days later joined the others at Troas, where we stayed seven days. <sup>7</sup> On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. <sup>8</sup> There were many lamps in the upstairs room where we were meeting. <sup>9</sup> Seated in a window was a young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep as Paul talked on and on. When he was sound asleep, he fell to the ground from the third story and was picked up dead. <sup>10</sup> Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "He's alive!" <sup>11</sup> Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left. <sup>12</sup> The people took the young man home alive and were greatly comforted. <sup>13</sup> We went on ahead to the ship and sailed for Assos, where we were going to take Paul aboard. He had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot. <sup>14</sup> When he met us at Assos, we took him aboard and went on to Mitylene. <sup>15</sup> The next day we set sail from there and arrived off Kios. The day after that we crossed over to Samos, and on the following day arrived at Miletus. <sup>16</sup> Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost.*

Luke is travelling with them, so there is more detail recorded here. Paul is joined by a team from all over Europe and Asia. And then in this Sunday evening service, we have the first recorded person falling asleep in church.

Let's continue with the 17-38, which is what we'll be focusing on today:

<sup>17</sup> From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. <sup>18</sup> When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. <sup>19</sup> I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. <sup>20</sup> You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. <sup>21</sup> **I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.** <sup>22</sup> "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. <sup>23</sup> I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. <sup>24</sup> However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace. <sup>25</sup> "Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. <sup>26</sup> Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. <sup>27</sup> For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God. <sup>28</sup> **Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.** <sup>29</sup> I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. <sup>30</sup> Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. <sup>31</sup> So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. <sup>32</sup> "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. <sup>33</sup> I have not coveted anyone's silver or gold or clothing. <sup>34</sup> You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. <sup>35</sup> In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" <sup>36</sup> When he had said this, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. <sup>37</sup> They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. <sup>38</sup> What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship.

Paul had spent 3 years in Ephesus, and now as he passed through the region he stopped to meet with the elders. You can see his connection and care. **This is the only speech in Acts given to a Christian audience.** Notice that the church has a team of elders, also called overseers, pastors, or shepherds. God's plan is not a solitary pastor or a hierarchical structure but a team of elders.

What do we learn from Paul's address to the Ephesian elders about what kind of people the church needs?

## 1) The church needs watchmen –

*Ezekiel 33:1-9 - The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup> "Son of man, speak to your countrymen and say to them: 'When I bring the sword against a land, and the people of the land choose one of their men and make him their watchman, <sup>3</sup> and he sees the sword coming against the land and blows the trumpet to warn the people, <sup>4</sup> then if anyone hears the trumpet but does not take warning and the sword comes and takes his life, his blood will be on his own head. <sup>5</sup> Since he heard the sound of the trumpet but did not take warning, his blood will be on his own head. If he had taken warning, he would have saved himself. <sup>6</sup> But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people and the sword comes and takes the life of one of them, that man will be taken away because of his sin, but I will hold the watchman accountable for his blood.' <sup>7</sup> "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. <sup>8</sup> When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. <sup>9</sup> But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself.*

In Ezekiel's time, the watchman was on the wall, looking out for the people of the city, making sure that if danger was coming, they sounded the trumpet. God uses that metaphor to tell Ezekiel that his prophets are to be like watchmen, letting people know of the judgment that is to come and the need for repentance. Unless the citizens of Israel and Judah acknowledged their sins, turned from them, repented and began again to obey God's law, they would die in their sins. And it was the job of the prophet, the watchman, to tell them.

Paul was functioning like a watchman to Ephesus. He tells the elders that he taught all things to all people in all ways. He taught publicly and house to house all things that would be helpful. He taught to both Jews and Greeks. He wants all to know.

<sup>20</sup> *You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house.*

And so he can proclaim that because he has done his job as a watchman, he is innocent of the blood of all men – he has made the message clear.

<sup>26</sup> *Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men.* <sup>27</sup>  
*For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God.*

He has done his job, and it is up to them if they believe. And what is the distilled message? **Turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.**

<sup>21</sup> *I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.*

Can you say that you are innocent of the blood of all men? Have you been a watchman? Who has God made you a watchman for?

This concept reminded me of a powerful video by Penn Jillette of the Las Vegas illusionist duo Penn & Teller. Penn Jillette is a very smart, outspoken atheist, and it is not hard to find videos online of him ridiculing religious people for their beliefs and practices. In one video, however, he spoke briefly of an encounter he had with a gentleman after one of his shows. Let me share some of what he said:

*He walked over to me and he said, "I was here at the show last night, I saw the show and I liked it." He was complimentary about my use of language and my honesty... he said nice stuff... and then he said "I brought this for you" and he gave me a pocket Gideon's Bible with the New Testament and Psalms... he said "I wrote in the front of this, and I wanted you to have it... I'm proselytizing... I want you to know I'm a businessman, I'm sane, I'm not crazy." And he looked me right in the eye, and it was really wonderful. I believe he knew that I was an atheist. But he was not defensive, and he looked me right in the eyes. And he was truly complimentary. It didn't seem in any way that it was empty flattery; he was kind, and nice, and sane, and looked me in the eye and talked to me, and then gave me this Bible. **And I've always said, I don't respect people who don't proselytize. If you believe there is a heaven and hell and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life or whatever and you think "well, it's not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward." How much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize? How much do you have to hate someone to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them that? If I believe that there is a truck bearing down on you, and you didn't believe it, there's a certain point at which I tackle you. And this is more important than that. This guy was a really good guy. He was polite and honest and sane and he***

*cared enough about me to proselytize and give me a Bible which had written in it a little note to me and five phone numbers and an email address in case I want to get in touch. Now, I know there is no God, and one polite person living his life right doesn't change that. But I'll tell you, he was a very, very, very good man, and that's really important, and with that kind of goodness, it's okay to have that deep of a disagreement. I still think religion does a lot of bad stuff, but that was a very good man."*

Who has God made you a watchman for? Who do you need to share the gospel with?

## **2) The church needs shepherds**

To lead the church means to be a shepherd to the flock that is the church. It does not mean being a CEO, or celebrity rock-star, or general. Shepherds must:

*Nurture the sheep* – Equip the church, exhort and admonish the church in sound doctrine, engage in regular prayer for the church, ensure the sick are visited and the weak are helped

*Direct the sheep* - Set vision and create policies, judge doctrinal issues, communicate regularly with the church

*Guard the sheep* - Protect from false teachers and divisive people, exercise church discipline as necessary

Feed them with the truth and warn them of error. Don't let the sheep become food for wild animals. Listen to Jesus' description of the good shepherd:

**John 10:9-15** - *I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. <sup>11</sup> "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. <sup>13</sup> The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. <sup>14</sup> "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-- <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father-- and I lay down my life for the sheep.*

They are God's flock. Jesus shed his blood to save them and bring them into his fold. Who will care for them?

*1 Peter 5:1-3 - To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: <sup>2</sup> Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers-- not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; <sup>3</sup> not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.*

And as God says to Ezekiel, woe to those shepherds who only look after themselves:

*Ezekiel 34:1-2 - The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup> "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?'*

Look at Paul's commitment. He was committed to them to the point of tears. He did not just act as a watchman sharing truth with them, but he also share his life as their shepherd:

<sup>19</sup> *I served the Lord with great humility and with tears,*

*1 Thessalonians 2:6-8 - We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else. As apostles of Christ we could have been a burden to you, <sup>7</sup> but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. <sup>8</sup> We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.*

Give yourself in care for others. Look at the love and connection here in Acts 20. It is more blessed to give than to receive.

<sup>35</sup> *In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'*"

Set your heart on service and you will be rewarded.

**3) The church needs people who are faithful to Jesus first –**

### Paul is not swayed by those who oppressed him

<sup>19</sup> *I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews.*

### Paul is also not afraid to leave when it was time to go.

<sup>24</sup> *However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.*

### The first thing Paul tells them is to watch their own walk with God closely

<sup>28</sup> *Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.*

Elders set an example of Godly living, of faithfulness to Jesus. 1 Tim 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, 1 Peter 5:1-4, Acts 20:28-31

**1 Timothy 3:1-7** - Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup> Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup> not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. <sup>4</sup> He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. <sup>5</sup> (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) <sup>6</sup> He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. <sup>7</sup> He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

*Personal holiness* – Above reproach, blameless, temperate, self-controlled, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not a lover of money, not overbearing, not quick-tempered

*Relationship to others* – Not quarrelsome, respectable, good reputation with outsiders

*Family life* – Faithful (fidelity or celibacy), manages his own family well

*Doctrine* – Not a recent convert, able to teach, holding to sound doctrine so as to instruct and refute

*Service* – Hospitable, willing and eager to serve

Who is my biggest opponent? Who is the biggest obstacle in this work? It's me. Leaders need to watch themselves and their own walk with God first and foremost.

*Robert Murray McCheyne – My people's greatest need is my personal holiness*

*1 Timothy 4:16 - Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.*

Paul was so faithful to Jesus that he was even heading to Jerusalem, even though he knew it was probably going to involve persecution. Very similar to Jesus.

<sup>22</sup> *"And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there.*

Following Jesus can mean hardship and persecution and even death.

What kind of people is God looking for in His church? Watchmen who will be faithful in preaching the gospel and calling people to repentance and faith in Jesus. Shepherds who will care for the sheep. And people who will prioritize their relationship with Jesus.